Structured Observation:

Techniques for gathering information about users in their own world

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ABSTRACT
This tutorial will focus on why and how to do observations of users in their own worksite. It will focus on practical application of techniques which can help systems professionals incorporate user input early in the development process.

Keywords
User-centered design, Observation, Ethnography, Contextual Inquiry, Qualitative data, User profiles, User data collection, Usability, Tools and techniques.

INTRODUCTION
Successful information systems are those that are driven by the needs of the business and users. Increasingly, Information Systems and business managers are realizing that this can only be achieved by incorporating user input in the system development process. The hard part is getting appropriate, representative information at the right point in the development cycle. Unfortunately, many attempts to get user input are "too little, too late."

One of the most powerful ways of getting user information that can be incorporated very early in the development process is through observation of users in their work context. Developers who already thought they had a good idea of the users' work and needs are usually amazed at how much they learn through observation. They can gather information with direct impact on design decisions., which is usually information they would not have been able to discover any other way.

But getting the benefits of observation requires a new set of skills and tools for developers. The overwhelmingly rich data requires methods to structure the process. In addition, observation is a new kind of interaction with users which developers need to understand in order to manage it smoothly. This tutorial will provide you with the tools to begin benefiting from this powerful technique.

CONTENT
The focus of this full-day tutorial is on how to gather information about the users and their work in their own workplace. It focuses on how to plan for and carry out observations of users, with a heavy emphasis on practical steps for the designer to take. It will include a mixture of lecture, class discussion, and small group exercises. The goal is to equip the practitioner to be able to carry out and benefit from structured observations.

OBJECTIVES
In this tutorial, participants will :

- learn what Structured Observation techniques are

- learn how to do 4 types of Structured Observations including:

    -- Naturalistic Observation

    -- Contextual Inquiry

    -- Usability Roundtable

    -- Artifact Walkthrough

- practice doing a Structured Observation (using Naturalistic Observation)

- identify next steps for data analysis and use in design

- learn when and how to apply these tools to the software development process

AUDIENCE

This is an introductory tutorial for practitioners which would be appropriate for Informational Systems (I/S) professionals, both programmers and managers, who are want to understand how their clients work in order to do a better job of system design. Some practical experience in an organization using technology is assumed, although it is not necessary to have done any kind of observation. This is a hands-on session which will focus on practical solutions and skills and will provide "in the trenches"

types of tools for participants to use with their own organizations or in their own work. While we will show links to relevant academic research from a variety of fields, the focus on the session will be on the problems faced by I/S organizations rather than by academics. It is, therefore, more suited to practitioners than to academics.

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